



Defense Intelligence Agency  
Appraisal

# Afghanistan: Soviet Withdrawal Scenario (U)

## Summary

The Soviets are expected to begin withdrawing their troops from Afghanistan on 15 May, in keeping with the Geneva agreements signed on 14 April. The pullout will probably be achieved by the successive evacuation of entire garrisons and areas, rather than through the "thinning" of personnel in units. Larger garrisons will be turned over to Afghan forces. As the Soviets withdraw, the Mujahedin will begin to focus their efforts mainly on Afghan forces in an effort to conserve strength. The limited cohesion of the Afghan forces will continue to erode during the withdrawal, and desertions to the resistance will increase.

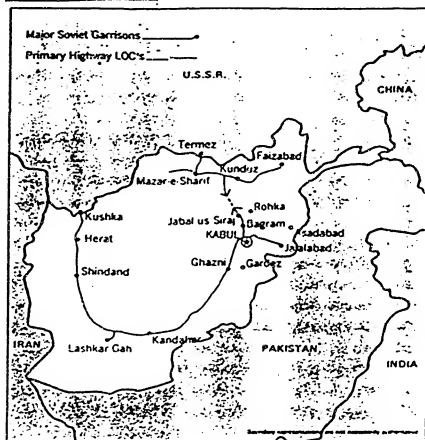
## Discussion

### Projected Soviet Withdrawal Scenario

According to the terms of the agreement reached at Geneva, the withdrawal will be "front-loaded." Half the Soviet troops will return to the USSR within the first 3 months of the withdrawal, and redeployment will be completed within 9 months.

Homeward movement will begin as Soviet outposts and remote base camps are closed or turned over to Afghan forces and as Soviet troops are consolidated in larger garrisons. Some equipment, weapons, ammunition, fuel, and other consumables will be passed to Afghan units while most of the armored vehicles and weapon systems will return to the USSR with the units. Certain support elements will depart before combat units, owing to the difficulties of long road marches with cumbersome equipment.

activities and will play down characterizations of the withdrawal as a Soviet defeat or an abandonment of a friendly government.



Once the protective perimeter is manned by Afghan troops, most Soviet troops will depart Kabul by air and land. As this phase nears completion, forces along the LOC

may be removed. The last Soviet combat troops to leave will most likely be withdrawn from Kabul by air, and barring major complications, the withdrawal will probably be completed well before the mandated 15 February 1989 deadline.

The Soviets are expected to publicize at least some unit departures and to stage news media opportunities in order to garner maximum domestic and international propaganda benefits. The Soviet and Afghan news media will emphasize the orderliness of withdrawal

#### Mujahedin Reactions to the Withdrawal

As the Soviets leave the provinces, the insurgents will probably focus on isolating major government garrisons and cities before attacking them directly. The first priority will most likely be to gain undisputed control of re-supply routes, followed by efforts to stop aerial resupply and tactical air support to the Afghan garrisons by rocketing airfields and maintaining anti-aircraft gun and missile teams. Before launching attacks to overrun government positions, Mujahedin commanders will encourage Afghan forces to surrender and will try to negotiate mass defections to their side. If this tactic fails, the Mujahedin will carry out direct assaults.

Disunity among the principal insurgent parties could handicap a coherent strategy aimed at reducing the Kabul redoubt and capturing the capital. In any event, the

resistance lacks the capability to storm the capital if it is well defended. As a result, the Kabul region may not fall until after several months of steady pressure. The Mujahedin could, however, be successful if the Afghan forces suffer an internal collapse or if serious factional fighting breaks out.

### Afghan Government's Survivability

The six components of the Afghan Armed Forces

are the army, the air force/air defense force, the border security forces, the Ministry of Interior's Sarandoi paramilitary units, the Ministry of State Security's (WAD's) combat units, and the militia. The Afghan Government, however, has never been able to fill these forces from the conscript manpower pool, and high desertion rates compound the problem.

Moreover, Afghan aircraft and ground force equipment are generally older and less capable than those in the Soviet forces.

On the whole, the largely unmotivated and poorly trained Afghan troops are no match for the Mujahedin.

The Afghan Armed Forces will continue to erode as the Soviet withdrawal progresses. The number of deserters, most of them with arms, will increase, possibly rendering some weaker units completely ineffective. During the later stages of the withdrawal, the internal security situation will most likely deteriorate rapidly.

This desperate time will be characterized by intense rivalry among People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) factions, and units loyal to the party's Khalq and Parcham factions may clash. The Khalqis are numerous in most combat units of the armed forces. Many believe they can defeat the Mujahedin without Soviet troops and therefore support the Geneva accords. The Parcham faction, which dominates the government, disapproves of the withdrawal agreements.


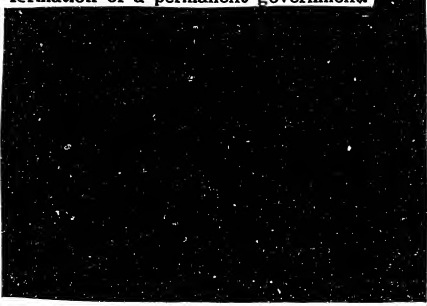
If these differences are not resolved, the Khalqis may first try to eliminate their PDPA rivals before dealing with the Mujahedin. The Khalqis may also oust President Najibullah as the Soviets withdraw and then form a government that will fight the Mujahedin to the finish. Alternatively, elements of the Afghan military sympathetic to the insurgents could stage a coup following the withdrawal and negotiate with resistance leaders for some type of coalition government.

A less likely scenario envisions the abandonment of Kabul by the PDPA without a climactic battle in order to concentrate in a Communist stronghold in the northern region of Afghanistan. The recent creation of another province in the recently established Northern Autonomous Zone and the numerous direct economic ties established between the northern provinces and the USSR are cited as preparations for a buffer zone between the USSR and veteran Mujahedin bent on carrying an anti-Soviet holy war, or jihad, into the Central Asian minority areas of the USSR.

### Outlook

Ultimately, the insurgent forces will cause the demise of the Communist

government. The successor government will probably be an uneasy coalition of traditionalist and fundamentalist groups; and its control will not extend far beyond Kabul. No matter which group wins Kabul, it will be under enormous pressure to proceed quickly with the formation of a permanent government.



*Prepared by:*

